

FRENCH INDOCHINA

One writer walking through an Annamite cemetery on All Saints' Day questioned a child whom he found there. The astonishing response was made in pidgin French:

Pas P&ole aujourd'hui . . . moi meme **chose** fransais, moi gratter papa.¹

For those Annamites who adopt bourgeois lives unfalteringly through parvenu snobbery, many more have selected certain French customs, including the language, but modified them almost beyond recognition. The Annamite, with his diverse mental set-up, cannot grasp the ideas behind Western culture, despite assimilationist dreams, and what he takes over purely externally, he necessarily distorts. Many customs are definitely antipathetic or comical to them. The soldiers who used to fondle native babies were not considered genial fellows but ogres who lived on a diet of children. Their feeling for the dead gives the Annamites a profound horror of surgery. Doctors have the greatest difficulty in persuading native women to submit to medical examinations. In general, it may be said that the Annamite has adopted what appealed to his vanity or what did not run counter to his traditions. The Annamites' insistence upon treatment finely graded to his rank and that of his interlocutor has been a great obstacle. If the Frenchman treats him unjustly as an inferior, he is insulted beyond repair; but if the snub is unconscious he disregards the intention and considers it a deliberate injury. The Annamite envoys at Paris noted with incredible minutiae the quantity and quality of deference shown them, yet they could not understand French decorum which imposed silence as a mark of respect upon the funeral procession of Thanh Thai's mother. The obvious sterility of this preoccupation with hierarchic

observance does not prevent its playing an important role in Franco-Annamite relations*

So striking are the temperamental resemblances, that one English traveler in Indo-China called the Annamites the French of the Far East. Le Myre de Vilers also pointed out this similarity. Both are, as a people, brave* industrious, intelligent, gay, ironic, *frondew>* desirous to be functionaries.² Unfortunately the resemblance is more **as** regards defects. The peasants, in particular, are alike

in addiction to craft and avarice, and feel the same need for living in **dirt discomfort.** Perhaps their very similarity makes for friction, but likely it *m* a different evaluation of their mutual qualities.

To **the** Aimamife, RffiaapeaQ virtues are tenacity, initiative, *smgfrm**

¹ J., *La fe de Iff* (Paris, **1908**), p. 36.